

# Preface



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*Guest Editors*

When Dr Agnes Rupley approached me to be a guest editor of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Exotic Animal Practice*, I immediately knew my topic—geriatrics. My interest in geriatrics began years ago when I was a registered nurse. I enjoyed working with elderly human patients and the challenges of age-related diseases. These patients had multiple health problems and were on multiple drugs. I worked with patients who had both cancer and renal failure, along with arthritis and diabetes. Balancing their care was often challenging.

While I was a nurse and was actually preparing to apply to veterinary medical school, I had an elderly terrier mix. Bonnie lived to be 19 years old and, as she aged, she developed mammary tumors and then was diagnosed with renal disease. She developed cataracts and arthritis. I was amazed at how much her aging process resembled that of my human patients. She even developed dementia at the end.

Bonnie was humanely euthanized in my first year of veterinary medical school. Since then, I have been drawn to elderly patients as I struggled to find ways to improve their quality of life and promote longevity. I found incredibly bonded owners who appreciated my efforts and were willing to give their time and money to prolong the lives of their pets.

When I first began seeing exotic pets, my focus was just on becoming adept at their care in general. As I became an exotic pet owner, my love for these amazing creatures again stirred a passion to promote a long and healthy life for them.

Over the last 2 decades, I have seen major advances in medicine and surgery in dogs and cats. Entire books on geriatrics have been published. But advances in medicine and surgery for exotic pets have moved at a slower pace, and progress in geriatric medicine for such pets has come along even more slowly.

As I contacted people to contribute articles, they all had the same response: “There is so little out there.” I told them that is why it is so important. I would like to thank all the authors. I know it was not an easy task. References were often difficult to obtain and we all had to pull from our own experiences. But, as exotic veterinarians, we’re used to that!

As I sit here holding my 3½-year-old rat, while sitting next to my 16-year-old cat and listening to my 21-year-old cockatoo, I feel we’ve come a long way since I graduated from veterinary school, and it is all due to the those energetic, passionate, creative, and hardworking individuals who call themselves exotic veterinarians.

I would like to especially thank Dr Patricia Gray, our avian resident and my co-guest editor, who spent long hours assisting me in the editorial process.

I hope this issue helps to spur further interest in the area of geriatric avian and exotic medicine.

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In this issue of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Exotic Animal Practice*, the focus is on the medical care of elderly exotic patients. It is not surprising that this is the first such issue since the periodical's inception in 1998. There has not been a whole lot published regarding the aged exotic patient. The focus has been on exotic animal husbandry and medicine in general, and with good reason. As is the case for more conventional companion animals, our care of exotic pets has improved dramatically over the past few decades, and our patients are actually living long enough to develop purely age-related health problems.

My two senior cats (Porcupine and Lizzy) both passed away recently. Watching them slow down with age over the past couple of years was hard for my husband and me. We knew they were starting to feel the effects of time, and that they would not be with us much longer. What helped us (and them) through this process was our awareness level as far as what to expect and how we could manage them as geriatric patients. The knowledge that we were doing everything medically possible to keep them comfortable and happy was very empowering, and when they did finally leave us we were able to say with certainty that they'd had a terrific life—from start to finish.

Every one of our patients deserves the best medical care we have to offer, on all levels. Aging brings about disease processes that can be very challenging, both to owners and to veterinarians. To provide the kind of preventive and palliative care necessary when dealing with our geriatric patients, we need to know what to expect. Although certain processes appear to be universal across species, we need to be aware of the many species-specific peculiarities with regard to aging. The following articles were compiled by veterinarians well versed in the care of elderly exotic animals, and I hope readers will take advantage of the information shared here when dealing with their senior patients.

I would like to thank Sharman Hoppes for inviting me to work on this project with her. It's been a very rewarding experience. I would also like to thank the contributing authors for their hard work: It is much appreciated.

This issue is dedicated to beloved elderly pets everywhere, be they 3-year-old rats, 33-year-old chinchillas, 55-year-old parrots, or 99-year-old fish.

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